

Final Report

City of Columbia
2015 Affordable Housing Symposium



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Symposium Overview

I. Key Event Objectives and Summary

The City of Columbia held an Affordable Housing Symposium on December 3 and 4, 2015. This event served as a forum to educate and share information regarding current and future affordable housing needs in Columbia. In addition, innovative approaches to address affordable housing were discussed. A very diverse group of community stakeholders and the public were involved in this inaugural symposium. (See list of participants in Event Guide, Appendix A)

Key Symposium Objectives

The three main objectives of the symposium were to:

1. Educate community leaders and a diverse group of key stakeholders on current affordable housing needs and current approaches to creating and funding more affordable housing.
2. Engage community leaders to help us define the problem, causes, impact, and solutions to affordable housing in Columbia and begin mapping a plan to address the need.
3. Identify actionable steps for moving forward to address the need for more affordable housing.

Event Summary

The symposium featured guest speakers John Engen, Mayor of Missoula, Montana, Rick Wishcamper of Rocky Mountain Development Group, and Michelle Allen, the City of Boulder, Colorado's Inclusionary Housing Program Manager. The symposium also included local speakers providing Topic Talk presentations on current needs, construction costs, financing and poverty.

The five local Topic Talk speakers included:

- Randy Cole, Housing Programs Supervisor for the City of Columbia
- Phil Steinhaus, CEO of Columbia Housing Authority
- Eric Morrison, Columbia Market President with Providence Bank
- Kara Linnemeyer, General Counsel and Sales Manager with Beacon Street Properties
- Darin Preis, Executive Director of Central Missouri Community Action Agency

The first day was capped off with a World Café style public meeting where members of the public had an opportunity to provide input to help shape the future of affordable housing efforts in Columbia.

On Day 2 of the symposium, an action planning session engaged the public and key stakeholder in identifying actionable steps our community should take to address affordable housing. At the end of the conclusion of the action planning session, participants were asked if they were willing to continue to help create more affordable housing solutions in the City of Columbia. Forty-seven of the estimated 60 people in attendance at the time completed the form indicating their interest. These names are reflected in Appendix C.

For a complete listing of planning committee members and volunteers, the symposium agenda, Topic Talk one sheeters summaries, event partners and other background information, please see the Event Guide in Appendix A. The PowerPoint slides from the event are attached as Appendix B.

The symposium was also Live Streamed on the City's channel and is now available for viewing at the City's website.

II. Pre-Symposium Planning

In advance of the symposium, consultants designed a pre-event survey which was distributed to registrants to gather information about their views of the importance of affordable housing. Fifty two registrants responded to three survey questions and provided the following perspectives:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being the “least important” and 10 being the “most important”) how would you rate the issue of affordable housing to our Columbia community?

The weighted average for this answer was 8.1, indicating that those registered to attend the symposium believe affordable housing to be an important issue to our Columbia community.

2. What does the issue of affordable housing mean to you personally?

3. What does the issue of affordable housing mean to the Columbia community?

An analysis of the answers to Questions 2 and 3 revealed that to the majority of respondents, housing is a basic human right and that meaning of affordable housing prevails over all others. Respondents used words and phrases such as affordable for all, safe, quality, diversity of housing in all neighborhoods, energy efficient, and good quality of life.

This pre-event survey told us that the diverse group of community members registered to attend and participate in the symposium were highly engaged in and personally committed to the issue of affordable housing.

III. Symposium Details

A diverse group of community stakeholders and the public attended and participated in the symposium. There were approximately 132 attendees the first afternoon. For a list of attendees, please see the attendee list in the Event Guide.

The City had a robust community engagement effort in order to maximize participation in the event. This included:

- Inserts in utility bills about the event
- Presentations at neighborhood and community meetings
- Emails to key stakeholder groups and citizens
- Personal phone calls and outreach from planning committee members to stakeholders
- Media releases
- Media interviews (prior to the event and at the event itself)

A. Day One:

1. Afternoon: Out of Town Experts/Guest Speakers

The symposium kicked off with sessions from three out of town experts. Guest speakers included John Engen, Mayor of Missoula, Montana, Rick Wishcamper of Rocky Mountain Development Group and Michelle Allen, the City of Boulder, Colorado's Inclusionary Housing Program Manager. The objectives of these sessions were to:

- Showcase best practices from other communities with similar demographics
- Provide examples of successful public/private partnerships where developers were able to do good while having a financially profitable project
- Create energy and build momentum to move forward and make something happen in our community

The speakers shared best practices and innovative approaches to affordable housing in their respective cities. Attendees were then able to ask questions. (Note: These sessions were livestreamed and the replay is available on the City's website.)

After the afternoon session, we asked participants to share “lessons learned”. Here are some of the lessons participants reported they learned from the presentations:

- Learned about inclusionary housing – an issue some knew little or nothing about at the start of the symposium
- The intersectionality of the issue of affordable housing with other issues
- How affordable housing is financed
- That quality design counts in building affordable housing
- About tools to fund affordable housing programs (property tax, TIF, federal programs (CDBG/HOME), commercial linkage fee, etc.
- About the high percentage of cost burden of housing in our community
- About the importance of zoning when building affordable housing
- That it’s possible to have a fare-free transit system (did it in Missoula) and that this is so important to housing affordability
- Our success will require our citizens to help pay for affordable housing and transportation services and to have affordable housing in their neighborhoods.
- We need a shared vision of safe, affordable housing as a basic human right.
- About how a developer’s showcase can be a useful tool to recruit quality investment. (Did this in Missoula)
- Affordable housing likely inflates the cost of new construction for middle income purchasers.
- Rental housing costs needs to be more in line with the average income of Columbia renters

2. Evening: Topic Talks and World Café

The goals for the evening portion of the symposium were two-fold:

- 1) For the public to actively engage in this issue and create momentum for future engagement on the affordable housing issue in Columbia.
- 2) To identify stakeholders who are willing to help to collaborate on the issue of lack of affordable housing in Columbia.

The evening event at the symposium featured local speakers providing Topic Talk presentations on current needs, construction costs, financing and poverty. Each speaker prepared a Topic Talk summary sheet which can be found in the Event Guide in Appendix A.

The four Topic Talks were on:

1. Current Affordable Housing Needs and Efforts (Randy Cole)
2. Columbia Housing Authority Efforts (Phil Steinhaus)
3. Financing, Construction Costs, Barriers to Affordable Housing (Kara Linnemeyer and Eric Morrison)
4. Social Impact and Poverty (Darin Preis)

The Topic Talks were followed by a World Café style public meeting where the public had an opportunity to provide input to help shape the future of affordable housing efforts in Columbia. Participants rotated between two of four stations to engage in 15-minute facilitated discussions on the following topics surrounding affordable housing in Columbia:

- Problems
- Myths/Education
- Impact
- Solutions

Two questions were asked in each of the topic areas by trained volunteer facilitators. Participants' responses were recorded by volunteer recorders. (See Event Guide for names of volunteers.)

The common themes identified from each of the topic areas are below:

Problems: Why is this problem - lack of affordable housing in Columbia - happening?

Common themes identified from community members' responses to these questions were:

- People don't make enough money
- No overall affordable housing policy
- Lack of education/financial education
- Losing affordable housing stock quicker than gaining it

Problems: What potential barriers are there to addressing this issue?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Political cycle 2 years (priorities change – which impacts the policy cycle on something that needs a longer term solution)
- Cost of living in Columbia is higher than St. Louis and Kansas City
- Shrinking revenue streams
- Lack of living wage jobs

Myths/Education: What are the most common myths about affordable housing in Columbia?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Breeds crime
- Lowers property values
- More out there than there actually is
- People who live in it don't want to work
- Located in central city only
- That it's only public housing
- You can't own a home with a low income.

Myths/Education: What are your initial thoughts about strategies to dispel those myths?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Education and public awareness (including student housing)
 - Tours of public housing
 - City website and database of rental properties
 - Utilize media to educate the public
 - How projects are funded (city/developer and breakdown of costs, including infrastructure)

Impact: What is impact of the lack of affordable housing on Columbia? On you?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Homelessness
- Having to work multiple jobs
- Deterioration of the family
- Commuter issues
- Rent per bed, not per unit
- Cost burdened renters
- Higher rate of mobility on children which has multiple impacts
- Decrease on credit quality
- Lack of community
- Adult children living at home with their parents
- Barrier to higher education
- Increases urban sprawl

Impact: What would the impact of more affordable housing in Columbia be on your life? On our community?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Improved quality of life
 - Less homelessness
 - Long-term health benefits
 - More time to participate in the community
 - Live in a community more aligned with our values
 - Kids are most likely to rise out of poverty in a mixed-income neighborhood
 - Creates a more engaged community

Solutions: What are the solutions and strategies to create more affordable housing in Columbia?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Developing an affordable housing policy (Land use, zoning, building codes, funding, incentives, preservation of housing stock, etc.)
- Public/Private partnerships
- Incentivizing affordable housing
- Funding (leverage existing federal funding and develop innovative funding sources/property taxes)
- Education
- Community priority
- Improved economic opportunities (living wage)

Solutions: What resources (i.e. partnerships, programs, finances, etc.) do we have in our community to implement those solutions and strategies?

Common themes identified from community members' responses were:

- Non-profits
- REDI
- University of Missouri
- Developers and landlords
- Community banks
- Business community

B. Day Two: Action Planning

1. Review and Report Outs

Day Two started with consultants providing participants with a report out on the results of the pre-event survey (see above), as well as a brief review of the events of the prior afternoon and evening. The information shared during the review and report out is reflected in Appendix B, the PowerPoint slides from the event.

2. Action Planning

Immediately following the review and report out, participants were assembled in an adjoining room to begin action planning. Participants were given 20 minutes to identify – at their individual tables – 2-3 approaches for addressing the lack of affordable housing in Columbia. A member of each table shared their conclusions with the full group. These results are reflected in Appendix D.

These results were placed on flipchart paper and participants were invited to prioritize the list by placing dots by two items. At the end of this process, the group had identified the following top five priorities:

1. Create a housing trust fund. (20 votes)
2. Intentional affordable housing City Council policy (incentives for builders/developers) (18 votes)
3. Creating incentives & removing disincentives (9 votes + 8 below = 17 votes)
 - Developer incentives (2 votes)
 - Incentives all along the way (6)
4. (TIE) Create a Director of Affordable Housing at the City of Columbia. (8 votes)
4. (TIE) Affordable housing is a community priority (have City Council pass resolution stating same) and a basic human right. (8 votes)

After these priorities were identified, the group spent some time trying to reach a consensus on the language of a statement they might all sign before leaving the symposium. They were unable to reach a consensus in

the short time allotted; however, there was considerable support for the following versions of a statement:

Version One: Affordable housing is essential for our community to be healthy economically and socially.

Version Two: Affordable housing is a priority for our community to be healthy economically and socially.

Version Three: We collectively agree to address affordable housing as a priority to ensure the health and sustainability of our community.

Version Four: Affordable housing is essential for our community to be healthy economically and socially. We collectively agree to address/tackle affordable housing as a priority issue (to ensure the health and sustainability of our community).

Many expressed that, depending on the final language, they would not only be willing to sign individually, but to get any approval required to sign on behalf of their employer organization. It was clear that the attendees were engaged and wanted to see something happen regarding affordable housing in Columbia.

At the end of the action planning session, participants were asked to commit to continuing to help create more affordable housing solutions in the City of Columbia. Forty-seven of the estimated 60 people in attendance at the time completed the form. Those names are reflected in Appendix C.

At each table, participants were also asked to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the next logical steps for keeping this work going in our community?
2. Who's not at the table that needs to be?
3. What is the single biggest obstacle to continuing to move this issue forward in our community?

Appendix E contains the merged answers of all participants. Consultants believe these responses are particularly important to review and take into consideration as an action plan is further refined and finalized.

3. Symposium Evaluation

Consultants engaged participants in the process of evaluating the 1 ½ day symposium. Highlights of this feedback, including key recommendations for process improvement, are as follows:

1. 90% of respondents agree all three event objectives were met
2. 77% of respondents agree symposium will lead to positive change for Columbia
3. 93% agree symposium was personally beneficial
4. The feedback on the guest speakers and local speakers was overwhelmingly positive (excellent or good)
5. The feedback on the facilitators was overwhelmingly positive (excellent or good)

Select participant recommendations for process improvement:

- ❖ Increase symposium to two full days in order to provide participants more time for discussion and planning
- ❖ Avoid trying to reach group consensus (i.e. on statement about affordable housing) when time is extremely limited
- ❖ Consider monthly/quarterly public forum/symposia at various venues

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

The Affordable Housing Symposium was, by all measures, a success. Attendance exceeded our goal and, with little more than an hour, participants generated a prioritized list of approaches to address affordable housing in our community that serves as the foundation to an action plan. They left the 1 ½ day symposium pleased with their event experience and committed to continue the work of increasing affordable housing opportunities in Columbia. The challenge now before the Planning Committee is to seize this momentum; to continue to communicate with and engage those who attended the symposium and to reach out to those who weren't present but who are needed in order for this effort to be successful.

New Chapter Coaching and Momentum Public Strategies were honored to work alongside the City to produce this important event and stand ready to assist the Planning Committee in its continuing efforts to address the need for more safe, quality, affordable housing in our community.